

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

January 29, 2004

CENTRAL COAST REGIONAL COLLABORATION

File No.: 03-153

Project Manager: Terri Nevins

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorize disbursement of up to \$75,000 to Greenbelt Alliance to develop a regional plan and map for land conservation in collaboration with Central Coast land trusts.

LOCATION: Central Coast counties from San Mateo through Ventura

PROGRAM CATEGORIES: Resource Enhancement, Agricultural Preservation

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31000 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement to Greenbelt Alliance of an amount not to exceed seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) to develop a regional plan and map for land conservation in collaboration with Central Coast land trusts, and to coordinate land conservation information, training and other needs of Central Coast land trusts, as described in the accompanying staff recommendation, subject to the condition that prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds:

1. Greenbelt Alliance shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a work program, schedule and budget, and the names and qualifications of any sub-contractors that it intends to employ.
2. The Resources Agency shall have entered into an agreement with the Conservancy to provide funding for this project.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with the purposes and criteria set forth in Chapters 4 and 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code regarding the preservation of coastal agriculture and the enhancement of coastal resources, and with the authority of the Conservancy under Public Resources Code Section 31111 to award grants to nonprofit organizations to undertake plans and feasibility studies for these purposes.
 2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
 3. Greenbelt Alliance is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)3 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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PROJECT SUMMARY:

The proposed authorization would provide a grant to Greenbelt Alliance for feasibility and planning efforts in the Central Coast to develop a regional vision and map for land conservation with local and regional organizations. Greenbelt Alliance will work with the Bay Area Open Space Council (BAOSC) to undertake this project at the request of Central Coast land trusts. The project would implement the recommendation to create regional collaborations contained in the recently released report “Advancing Conservation by California Land Trusts: A Report on a Statewide Assessment and Evaluation of Options with Recommendations from the Ad-Hoc Steering Committee” (October 2003).

Currently, there is no regular or formal opportunity for land conservation organizations throughout the Central Coast to communicate with one another, address regional issues, or meet their training needs. Although individual land trusts know what they have protected, and some are aware of the larger acquisitions completed by other organizations, there is not a comprehensive database and graphic display of the protected lands available to assist Central Coast land trusts in coordinating conservation efforts and ensuring that habitat and wildlife corridors are secured.

Central Coast land trusts have requested assistance from Greenbelt Alliance and BAOSC to: (1) build awareness of conservation needs throughout the region and the individual activities of participating land trusts; (2) articulate a regional vision and goals for land conservation along the Central Coast; (3) identify and address regional needs; (4) increase peer learning, information exchange, and training opportunities; (5) increase partnerships between organizations; and (6) develop regional initiatives. Conservancy funding would enable Greenbelt Alliance and the BAOSC to facilitate a collaboration of Central Coast land conservation organizations to develop a regional vision and goals for conservation efforts, create a GIS database of protected lands, hold training workshops to increase technical expertise, and organize quarterly meetings to increase communication and coordination.

Greenbelt Alliance is a nonprofit environmental organization whose mission is to advance the conservation of open space lands. BAOSC is a project of Greenbelt Alliance with its own program areas and dedicated staff. Through BAOSC, Greenbelt Alliance undertakes research and education to improve the planning and conservation of land and facilitates communication between conservation organizations. The proposed project will improve the ability of conservation organizations to plan, identify, and articulate regional land conservation goals.

Project History: Land conservation organizations in the Central Coast have been discussing the need for increasing collaboration and expertise in the Central Coast area for the past few years, and specifically the need to identify what has been protected and to create a regional vision and goals for future conservation efforts. The discussion of a Central Coast collaboration gained momentum at the recent Land Trust California Day held in Sacramento in conjunction with the Land Trust Alliance Annual Land Trust Rally. Representatives from the Central Coast land trust community agreed to participate in a regional collaboration and to seek funding for this effort. Recognizing the leadership and expertise that Greenbelt Alliance and BAOSC have demonstrated in creating successful collaborations in the San Francisco Bay Area, and preparing the statewide assessment just completed, Central Coast land trusts asked Greenbelt Alliance to work with the BAOSC in facilitating a regional collaboration for coastal counties from San Mateo to Ventura. The Resources Agency has agreed to provide funding to the Coastal Conservancy for the Central Coast land trust regional collaboration.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	\$ 75,000
Big Sur Land Trust	42,500
Resources Legacy Fund	20,000
Elkhorn Slough Foundation	20,000
In-kind (BAOSC and others)	<u>42,000</u>
Total Project Cost	\$199,500

The Conservancy's contribution to the proposed project would be funded through an appropriation to the Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP) authorized by Congress under Section 903 of the Commerce, Justice, State (H.R. 5344) Fiscal Year 2001 Appropriations Act. The mission of the CIAP is to ensure comprehensive and coordinated management, conservation, and enhancement of California's ocean and coastal resources. The funds were appropriated to the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, which has made California's portion available to the California Resources Agency. The Coastal Conservancy will enter into an Interagency Agreement with the Resources Agency to direct CIAP funds to this project.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

The Conservancy is authorized under Section 31111 of the Public Resources Code to fund and undertake plans and feasibility studies, and to award grants to nonprofit organizations for these purposes, in order to implement Division 21. The proposed grant to Greenbelt Alliance would assist the nonprofit organization and its collaborators as follows. The proposed authorization is consistent with the purposes and objectives of Division 21, §§31251-31270 of the Public Resources Code, in that the collaboration amongst Central Coast land trusts will result in the identification and planning of significant opportunities for coastal resource enhancement. Consistent with §31254, local agencies and nonprofit organizations will participate in the development of a regional vision and goals for coastal resource enhancement projects along the Central Coast of California. Consistent with §§31150-31156, the proposed authorization will also provide a forum for Conservancy partners that will facilitate the identification of significant opportunities for the preservation of agricultural lands and joint development of agricultural protection projects.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective A**, a Central Coast regional vision for public accessways, open space and parks, especially in disadvantaged areas will be developed.

Consistent with **Goal 4 Objective A**, the proposed project will assist in the identification of significant coastal resource properties for acquisition.

Consistent with **Goal 6, Objectives A and B**, the regional collaboration will help identify opportunities to preserve and restore coastal watersheds, create river parkways, and improve water quality.

Consistent with **Goal 7, Objectives A and B**, the regional collaboration will help to identify strategic coastal farmlands and/or easements.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S
PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** The projects are supported by a large number of conservation organizations (see Exhibit 1).
4. **Location:** The proposed project includes the coastal zone and coastal watersheds of San Mateo, Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties. The project would benefit coastal resources by developing a regional vision and goals, mapping protected lands, and training that will facilitate the protection and enhancement of lands with habitat, agricultural, and open space resources.
5. **Need:** Although this project has been discussed for years by land conservation organizations in the region, there have not been the resources or leadership to initiate the collaboration. Further, matching funds for this project have been unused for over one year due to the absence of funding for the collaboration. The Resources Agency has requested that the Conservancy grant the funds provided to it by the Agency for this project.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The Central Coast of California contains coastal resources and agricultural lands of statewide significance. Regional collaboration will assist in the preservation and restoration of these resource lands. The project would implement the recommendation to create regional collaborations contained in the recently released report "Advancing Conservation by California Land Trusts: A Report on a Statewide Assessment and Evaluation of Options with Recommendations from the Ad-Hoc Steering Committee" (October 2003).

Additional Criteria

8. **Resolution of more than one issue:** There are several needs in the Central Coast conservation community that the proposed project would address (identification of regional vision and goals, mapping of protected lands, improved communication, and training to improve expertise to carry out projects).
9. **Leverage:** See the “Project Financing” section above.
12. **Readiness:** The matching funds for the project are in place and ready for expenditure. The grantee and subcontractors are experienced in the work proposed, are ready to start, and have completed other projects in a timely fashion.
13. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** See the “Project History” section above.
15. **Cooperation:** The project will have in-kind contributions from more than two dozen non-profit organizations and public agencies. Letters of support from a small number of these express their intent to cooperate (Exhibit 1).

CONSISTENCY WITH THE COASTAL ACT:

The proposed project is consistent with the following provisions of the Coastal Act, Public Resources Code Sections 30000 *et seq.*:

Central Coast land trust collaboration would further the planning and management policies contained in §30231, which states, in part, that “the biological productivity and the quality of coastal waters, streams, wetlands, estuaries, and lakes appropriate to maintain optimum populations of marine organisms and for the protection of human health shall be maintained and, where feasible, restored. . . .”

Section 30240(a) specifies that “environmentally sensitive habitat areas shall be protected against any significant disruption of habitat values, and only uses dependent on those resources shall be allowed within those areas.” The proposed coordination of land trust conservation efforts would help ensure that environmentally sensitive habitats and wildlife corridors between habitat areas are protected.

Section 30241 requires that “The maximum amount of prime agricultural land shall be maintained in agricultural production to assure the protection of the areas' agricultural economy, and conflicts shall be minimized between agricultural and urban land uses. . . .” The proposed project would help advance the objectives of this section.

Section 30251 states, in part, that “[t]he scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance.”

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed regional collaboration is categorically exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306, which exempts basic data collection and resource evaluation activities. Upon Conservancy approval of this project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.